



# Scout Bassett: Redefines Ability



Redefining ability: Scout Bassett has one leg. She is a triathlete. Here, she relaxes for a moment at the University of Southern California's campus. *Alison Hewitt/UCLA Today*

**S**cout Bassett is a runner. She wakes up every morning at 4:30. She trains until 8:00 a.m. Then she goes to work. Then she trains for two more hours.

“When I’m training and competing, I don’t feel disabled. All I feel is the freedom of being able to move,” she said.

Bassett is training to compete in track for the 2012 London Paralympics. These are Olympic games for athletes with physical or intellectual impairments.

## TOUGH START

Bassett was born in China. She lost her right leg in a fire before her first birthday. After that, she was left outside an orphanage.

“The seven years I lived in the orphanage were extremely painful and difficult,” Bassett said. “I don’t have any memories of ever going outside once in seven years.”

Susi and Joe Bassett are American. They are from Harbor Springs, Michigan. They visited the orphanage in 1994. The Bassetts went to China to pick up a baby girl they had adopted. But they wanted to

look at other rooms in the orphanage before they went home.

In one room, there were 20 children sitting around a table. Two of these children caught the Bassetts’ attention. One little boy sang a song for the couple. Another little girl — Scout — looked quietly up at them. Within a year, all three children were members of the Bassett family.

“I didn’t know she was missing a leg because she was sitting at a table,” Susi Bassett said in an interview. She was talking to the Challenged Athletes Foundation

(CAF). The CAF is an organization that helps people with disabilities to be active. “But I said, ‘Well gosh, that’s all the more reason she needs me.’”

### REDEFINING ‘ABLE’

Bassett says sports help unite people from different backgrounds. Bassett was very different from her American classmates. Sports helped Bassett overcome these culture and language differences.

At first, Bassett spent a lot of time on the bench. She was on the junior high softball, basketball and soccer teams. But she didn’t play very much.

“I quickly discovered that sports only seemed to magnify my disability,” Bassett said. But sitting on the bench “taught me to never allow someone else’s words or actions to dictate my limits.”

When she was 14, Bassett received a prosthetic leg. It was designed for sports. She immediately began competing in track. She lost her first race, but she was inspired by the possibilities.



Quick stop: Triathlete Bassett changes from her walking leg to her biking leg. *Alison Hewitt/UCLA Today*

“It was never about winning or flashing an impressive time. I did it to prove to myself I could overcome my fears and doubts,” she said.

Bassett soon discovered CAF. The CAF gave Bassett financial and emotional support and training. This helped her to compete in track. Since then, Bassett has won medals in the last four paratriathlon world championships. She also volunteers as the organization’s spokesperson.

“I hope my involvement with CAF will empower physically challenged people to fight for their dreams and help to change people’s perceptions about what it means to be ‘able,’” she said. “I may have lost my leg, but not my courage or will to continue redefining my ability.”

### RETURNING A CHAMPION

Bassett now has four legs. She has an everyday walking leg and a running leg. She also has a sprinting leg and a biking leg. The different prosthetics have helped Bassett finish many triathlons. One of them was the 2011 Paralympic World Championships, in China. She went back to China for the first time in 16 years.

Bassett returned to her home country as a great athlete. This was emotional for her.

“Throughout the race, I was lifted and carried by the cheers of the crowd and fans who came out to watch,” she said. As she got close to the finish line, Bassett broke down in tears of pride and joy. “In that moment, I could not believe I was once an orphan and now about to medal in the world championships.”

Leg up: Bassett lost a leg in a childhood accident. But now she has four prosthetic legs: an everyday walking leg, a running leg, a sprinting leg and a biking leg. *Alison Hewitt/UCLA Today*

